

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER APPOINTS WORKING GROUP ON INFANT MORTALITY

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Infant mortality claims the lives of seven times more children in Virginia each year than does motor vehicle accidents yet receives far less attention and focus, State Health Commissioner Karen Remley, M.D., MBA, said today in announcing the appointment of a working group of medical and health professionals and community and civic leaders to address the problem.

In 2007, 839 infants died in Virginia, with premature births accounting for more than half the total. Earlier today, the March of Dimes released its first national “Premature Birth Report Card,” giving the United States a “D” grade for its preterm birth rate of 12.7 percent.

“The March of Dimes report is a powerful way to raise public awareness of an issue, premature births, that is a significant contributor to infant deaths in our state,” Commissioner Remley said. “The report points out the immediate need to address three of the major causes of premature births — women who are uninsured, pregnant women who smoke and women who choose birth times through Caesarean sections or induced labor.”

In 2007, the infant mortality rate in Virginia was 7.7 per 1,000 live births. The mortality rate for African-American babies, 15.5 per 1,000 live births, was twice as high as the overall rate while for Caucasian babies it was 6.0 per 1,000 live births. Gov. Timothy M. Kaine has set a target of reducing the state’s infant mortality rate below 7 by 2010.

“In recent years, we have learned a great deal about the contributing causes of infant mortality. To save the lives of more babies, we need to be more proactive in sharing this information with pregnant women, their families and others in the community who provide child care, for example grandparents and babysitters,” Dr. Remley pointed out.

“Our emphasis should be on helping expectant moms with birth preparations that include information on prenatal care, nutrition, controlling weight gain, not smoking and carrying a baby to full term whenever possible. Once a baby is born, it also is important for parents and care providers to know that babies should sleep on their backs in their own cribs,” added Dr. Remley, whose career as a pediatrician includes service as a pediatric emergency specialist.

The Commissioner said an important step in changing behaviors is involving more members of the community who have credibility and influence with local families, such as church leaders, local physicians, educators, civic and business officials, grocers or even hair stylists. She also cited AARP, because so many of its members are grandparents and caregivers.

“While public information campaigns can deliver an effective broad-based message about healthy behaviors, even more effective is the counsel that young people receive in their local communities from people they know and trust,” Commissioner Remley said.

The Commissioner’s Working Group brings together a diverse group of community leaders with medical and health professionals to develop specific strategies and actions that can be taken in the state’s local communities over the next several years to improve the health of pregnant women, new mothers and infants.

Members of the Working Group include:

Dr. Alfred Z. Abuhamad, Chairman, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Eastern Virginia Medical Center, Norfolk;

Laura Allen, Infant Services Coordinator, Children’s Hospital, Richmond;

Dr. Alison Ansher, MPH, Director, Prince William Health District, Manassas;

Sister Cora Billings, RSM, Richmond;

Dr. Joann Bodurtha, MPH, Professor of Human Genetics, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond;

Gary Brown, Director, Office of Emergency Medical Services, Virginia Department of Health;

LaVern Jackson Chatman, President, CEO, Northern Virginia Urban League, Alexandria;

Barbara Crump, Director of Women’s and Health Ministries, Baptist General Convention of Virginia, Richmond;

Dona Dei, Director of Program Services, March of Dimes National Capital Area Chapter, Arlington;

Dr. Mark Levine, MPH, Director, Henrico Health District;

Julie Locke, Regional CEO Mid-Atlantic Region, AMERIGROUP Community Care, Richmond;

Sara Long, March of Dimes, Glen Allen;

Dr. Fred Mecklenburg, Chairman, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Inova Fairfax Hospital, Falls Church

Rebecca Mendoza, Director, Maternal and Child Health Division, Department of Medical Assistance Services, Richmond;

Faith Miller, RN, MSN, WHNP, Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses, Richmond;

Dr. Wade Neiman, Chair, Virginia Section, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Lynchburg;

Dr. Venita Newby-Owens, MPH, Director, Virginia Beach Health District, Virginia Beach;

Dr. Ralph Northam, Associate Professor of Neurology, Eastern Virginia Medical School, Norfolk; State Senator, 6th District, Norfolk;

Deborah D. Oswalt, Executive Director, Virginia Health Care Foundation, Richmond;

Dr. Vernita Peebles, Pediatric Partners, Chesapeake;

Dr. Manuel Peregrino, Medical Director, Neonatology, Carilion Clinic Children's Hospital, Roanoke;

Cathy N. Pond, Executive Director, YWCA, Richmond;

Dr. Holly Puritz, Norfolk;

Dr. Michael Royster, Director, Office of Minority Health and Public Health Policy, Virginia Department of Health;

Michael and Andrea Sanders, Richmond;

Rose Stith-Singleton, Project Director, Richmond Healthy Start Initiative,
Virginia Department of Social Services;

Dr. Jerome F. Strauss III, Ph.D., Dean, School of Medicine, Virginia
Commonwealth University; Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs, VCU Health
System;

Dr. David Suttle, Director, Office of Family Health Services, Virginia Department
of Health;

Rovenia Vaughn, NAACP, Powhatan;

Dr. E. Mark Watts, Virginia Academy of Family Physicians, Richmond;

E. Ann Scott, Lynchburg;

Dr. Carl F. Wentzel III, President, Virginia College of Emergency Physicians;

Nancy Jallo, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Family and Community Nursing,
Virginia Commonwealth University School of Nursing;

Calvin Reynolds, Director, Division of Health Statistics, Virginia Department of
Health;

Leigh Bernard, Physician Liaison, Bon Secours Richmond Health System;

Dr. David Buchsbaum, Managing Medical Director, State-Sponsored Business-
Medicaid, Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield, Richmond;

Emily E. Drake, RN, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Nursing; Director,
Baccalaureate Program, University of Virginia School of Nursing;

Dr. Robert Gunther, MPH, FAAP, President, Virginia Chapter, American
Academy of Pediatrics;

Dr. John W. Harrington, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Eastern Virginia
Medical School;

Cindy Hearrell, RN, CEN, President, Virginia Emergency Nurses Association;

Paul O. Hirschbiel, Chairman, Board of Directors, Virginia Early Childhood
Foundation;

Bill Kallio, AARP Virginia State Director;

Steven S. Kast, CEO, Boys and Girls Clubs of the Virginia Peninsula;

Angela Kellam, Vice President, Resource Development, United Way of South Hampton Roads;

Dr. Ann Kellams, Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics and Director of Newborn Nursery, University of Virginia Health System; and

Dr. Kris E. Kennedy, Complete Women's Care, Virginia Beach.

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